



MONTANA LEGISLATIVE AUDIT DIVISION

Security and Maintenance of Montana Election Systems

THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

BACKGROUND

Montana Elections are managed and administered by the Office of the Secretary of State (SOS) and local officials. Each of the counties administer elections differently, while SOS is required to advise and assist them. Additionally, the state and the counties receive resources and support from the federal government.

Agency:

The Office of the Secretary of State

Secretary of State:

Corey Stapleton

Division:

Elections

This information systems audit examined whether SOS is evaluating physical security and managing election risks, including the accuracy of the voter registration database. We found that, although SOS is making improvements to elections, further definitions are required to identify scope of election security and election security measurements. SOS can also improve success of future security initiatives by updating grant management practices, with potential oversight opportunities from the legislature. SOS provides counties the tools to manage the accuracy of voter registration and status changes, but our work found that SOS is not conducting state-level maintenance procedures where it is most efficient. These are needed to ensure changes are made in a timely manner and to identify potential training, system, or process improvements.

KEY FINDINGS:

Statute and rule do not define the scope of election security or align with best practices. Due to the decentralized management of elections, counties need a consistent definition of security and a formal security assessment process. Current law lacks clarification of election security and rule does not specify security measures.

Management of federal grants do not align with best practices. SOS does not have performance measurements in place as outlined in grant management best practices. SOS does not have any controls in place to ensure federal grant funding is being used to meet objectives and goals of the grant.

SOS does not have an Information Security Manager position to oversee all divisions within the department. Since 2017, SOS has had a vacant Information Security Manager position that is necessary to independently oversee all aspects of security within an agency, including election security.

The department does not have a state-level maintenance program in place to ensure accuracy and timeliness of voter registration statuses. SOS relies on the county election administrators to update their residents voter status. Although SOS provides the resources and information, they are not verifying that status updates have occurred within a timely manner.

For the full report or more information, contact the Legislative Audit Division.

leg.mt.gov/lad

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

In this report, we issued the following recommendations:

To the office: 4

To the legislature: 1

RECOMMENDATION #1 (PAGE 10):

Using industry standards and best practices, the Montana Legislature should define the scope of election security and mandate assessments at the local levels.

Office response: Concur

RECOMMENDATION #2 (PAGE 12):

SOS should align the definition of election security within rule with statute and provide further guidance on necessary security measurements.

Office response: Concur

RECOMMENDATION #3 (PAGE 16):

SOS should enhance the grant management program, including implementing measurable objectives, goals, and timelines while ensuring ongoing evaluation is occurring to measure success.

Office response: Concur

RECOMMENDATION #4 (PAGE 21):

SOS should fill the vacant Information Security Manager position to ensure both election security and agency-wide security have consistent, independent, and comprehensive oversight.

Office response: Concur

RECOMMENDATION #5 (PAGE 30):

SOS should implement between a state-level maintenance program to address timeliness and verification of voter status updates in the voter registration database.

Office response: Concur